

# THE LAST AUTOCRAT OF RUSSIA—CZAR NICHOLAS II.

Superstition and Short Sightedness of the Emperor a Steady Growth—At One Time He Condemned Bloodshed But Was Finally Argued Into Belief That It Was Necessary to Hold His Empire—Saints Manufactured to Deceive the Czar

The following intimate and authoritative study of the life and character of the Czar of Russia was written by a Russian statesman who is a member of the Emperor's entourage. His name is known to THE SUN, but is suppressed for obvious reasons.

## PART TWO

THE same network of intrigues that used to be woven around the monarchs of old is woven now around the contemporary rulers. But while some of them do not feel the burden of these intrigues built of flattery and gossip, others are so enmeshed in these nets that they stumble on their way, and still others finally cease to differentiate between light and shadows, willfully draping themselves with the qualities ascribed to them by their flatterers, and thus becoming the laughing stock of the people close to them. Nicholas II. belongs to this third category.

How the outward signs of religious devotion in the palace as well as in Church affairs attracted the soul of Nicholas II. remains a secret. In his childhood Nicholas did not show any inclination toward religious feelings, and during his youth his mode of life gave still less promise of any tendencies toward pietism. It is possible that his narrow escape at Borki, and in Japan, and other strong impressions in his youth helped to develop in him a sense of faith in some special divine patronage. Through the art with which the spiritual advisers of the Czar presented to him this special patronage, in the form of religious and mystic ceremonies, Nicholas II. was logically led to the belief in various newly discovered saints, in spiritualism and fortune telling.

The types of devotees who are unable to distinguish between faith and superstition, between religion and mere ceremonialism, are very rare among the intelligent classes of the Russian people, and even among the younger element of the peasantry this ignorance is passing away. Only in the smaller towns of the remote and deserted provinces this superstition is still predominating in Russia. The Russian autocrat is not above the intellectual level of these insignificant and passive elements of his subjects.

It was quite natural that such a clever and unprincipled bureaucrat as Plevh should try to avail himself of these weaknesses of the Czar and exert great influence over him. But before Nicholas fell under Von Plevh's influence his weak mind and sickly will were made the playthings of less skillful charlatans.

Neither his mental limitations nor his lack of will power hindered the Czar from devoting considerable thought to the fundamental questions of government. Through the close circle of court officials, through the chains of the secret service department, through the dense foliage of his parks, the dull cry of Russian life came to the Emperor, and even his inexperienced ear caught the notes of discontent and despair. From time to time the Czar even made attempts to feel his way toward his people, but each time these attempts ended with some comical and amusing episode.

Thus, one day he received in audience Count Leo Tolstoy, the son of the great Leo Tolstoy. Like most of the children of the great writer, this son was devoid of talent but consumed with envy of his father's great fame. The audience lasted about two hours. In the course of the conversation young Tolstoy and the Czar discussed the form of government in the Russian Empire. Tolstoy had the courage to point out to the Czar that a constitution was inevitable.

The Czar declared then, as he repeated upon later occasions, that he was also in favor of a constitution, but that he was prevented from granting such a constitution by the oath in the presence of the cathedral, on the day of the coronation, when he swore to preserve the autocracy. Later the leaders of the Black Hundreds made use of this for the purpose of checking the development of constitutional institutions. Count Tolstoy, who mastered courage at the end of his conversation with the Czar, appealed to Nicholas II. to read the simple life, to stop killing animals, to leave off drinking and smoking. The dialogue assumed a comical character and of course produced no effect of any kind.

Then, during the year 1909, the famine—and before 1909 there had been fifteen years of famine in succession in Russia—a certain man named Klopov was admitted to the Czar. Klopov was an unknown and insignificant man, but he was filled with a burning desire to save Russia. Arrangements were soon made by which the Czar gave Klopov unlimited authority to investigate the famine stricken provinces. But as such an investigation could hardly appeal to the Minister of the Interior, Klopov was shortly exposed by the administration, and this effort of the Czar to learn the truth about Russia ended as early as he comically as all other efforts of the Czar to act without the advice of his functionaries.

In the meantime the soul of Nicholas was getting ever more and more confused. The absence of a male heir to the throne made the political situation at home ever graver, for the appetites of the side lines to the throne were growing. The disillusioned Czar used to row at night in the Neva, trying thus to forget his grief. The Empress looked with tears upon the little girls that were born to her.

And when Grand Duke George died of consumption in a ditch by the highway, the traditional title of Czarewitch was taken away from the new Czarewitch, Grand Duke Mikhail, because it was feared that this title might interfere with the birth of a son to Nicholas. In vain did the former Minister of the Interior, Sipyagin, take the Imperial couple to the holy places in Moscow, assuring them that that would bring a male heir to the Russian throne. The images were silent, the bodies of the monks which lay in open coffins did not stir in answer to the warm prayers of Nicholas and Alexandra.

When that failed the Imperial couple turned away from the sacred relics of the Greek orthodox church and with the ease of primitive natives went to the Crimea to turn tables and to devote themselves to the fortune telling of the

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But the effect of this information was unexpected. The Czar, who was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the French fortune teller, refused to believe Hatchkovsky. The criminal record of Philippe in the past did not prevent him from enjoying the hospitality of the Russian Emperor, for there were many people at the Russian court whose records were of the same criminal level. No one had any cause to be ashamed in the presence of the other.

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Finally the moment arrived when Philippe's soothsaying came to an end. The Empress was to give birth to a child, and according to Philippe that child would surely be a boy. Showered with favors and with money and rewarded with a valuable medal the French charlatan left Russia. It is known that the Czar wrote a letter to M. Loubet, then President of France, asking him to recommend his new "learned" friend to the attention of the French Academy of Science. The Czar's request was not granted. Philippe returned to his usual occupation and to his conflicts with the French criminal code.

The child born to the Russian Empress was not a son. A temporary disillusion set in, shaking the Czar's faith in fortune telling, turning of tables and various forecasts. The place of the fortune tellers was now taken by the priests. They made all efforts to avail themselves of their opportunity and were happy to find an ally in Von Plevh, the Minister of the Interior, who was in power at the time. The pilgrimages to the monasteries had failed, the powerlessness of the bones of the saints had been demonstrated and the Czar had lost confidence in them. It was necessary to discover new saints, new miracle workers. Fortunately there were not only a candidate among the uncanceled monks but also a legend which could easily be connected with the religious festivities which were in preparation.

Among the Romanovs there existed a legend about the prediction made years ago by a hermit named Seraphim, in Sarov, government of Tambov, with reference to the future reign of the Czar. The text of the forecast, it was said, was written out by a retired General, and, according to Alexander III., the document was somewhere in the archives of the Department of the Gendarmes, which were also the archives of the empire. But all quests of the document led to no results. Then some one suggested that the police department might know the whereabouts of the precious document, and the paper was really found. At that time the Czar referred to in the document containing Seraphim's prediction, ascended the Russian throne.

"In the beginning of the reign of this monarch," read the document, "there will be misfortunes and misery among the people. There will be an unsuccessful war. There will be a great uprising within the empire—father will rise against son and brother against brother. But the second half of his reign will be bright and the Czar will enjoy a long life."

This document produced a profound impression upon the superstitious Czar.

especially since some of the incidents mentioned had really occurred. Although the war and revolution were still to come the coronation tragedy on the Khodynka field, the famine, the students, and workmen's movements, the agrarian disorders in the government of Poltava—all these matters made the first part of the prediction important.

Seraphim's influence upon the common Russian people was great. His life as a hermit, the stories of how he used to stand motionless upon a rock for a long time, how he used to take religious baths in icy water, the accounts of his kindness and piety—all this attracted numerous fanatics to the desert where he had established a church. After his death his followers felt confident that in due time Seraphim would be canonized and that the time required by the Church for the body of the saint to remain in his grave should be shortened in his case.

Von Plevh took all that into consideration. He realized that the monks for the sake of the benefits that could be derived by the monastery from the religious festivities following the discovery of the body of the saint, would not be too pedantic and would relax some of the rules of the Church if necessary. In connection with this it is interesting to relate the incident of the attempt upon the ikon made in the monastery of Kursk at about the same time.

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THE CZAR VISITING THE PILGRIMS IN SAROV.

The ikon was supposed to possess the power of working miracles, yet for some reason the number of pilgrims to that monastery was constantly declining. A wave of unrest was spreading through Russia; here and there disorders broke out, and from time to time some of the Ministers were assassinated. Then the monks decided to simulate a terrorist act against the image of the saint. It was a simple matter, but the technical end of it proved too much of a task for the monks, for it was necessary to produce an explosion which would destroy everything around the ikon without injuring the holy image itself. That would be a great miracle and the affairs of the monastery would be improved immediately.

The monks fastened a heavy metallic plate which was to ward off the explosion. At night the monks placed the dynamite underneath and set it off, and the city of Kursk was awakened by a deafening explosion. The police arrived upon the scene, and as they had not been initiated in the secret, the metallic plate, fixed in the protocol, thus pointing the fingers of the plot. All efforts were exerted to hush up the case, but Gov. Milutin, who was intoxicated most of the time, was fond of relating the story of the monks' scheme. The monks, of course, hated him in return.

In Sarov there was no need for any criminal details, nevertheless the arrangement conflicted with the regulations of the Russian Church. One of the absolute requirements in canonizing a saint in Russia is that the body, when taken from the grave, must be in perfect condition. The ascetic mode of life of these monks and the conditions of the soil in the cemeteries of the monasteries, usually situated in sandy places, paralyzed the process of decay, and after a certain number of years the body turns brown, retaining its former appearance. In one of the caves in the Caucasus seven such bodies were found and were seized by the local organizations for their churches. Later, however, it became known that the seven bodies were those of a band of robbers who had been driven into that cave and who had been starved to death.

Everybody was confident that Seraphim's body would be in perfect condition. But to the general astonishment there was an ordinary skeleton in his grave. The local archbishop, scandalized by the sad state of the protocol of Seraphim, refused to sign a report in which was a description of the perfect condition of the body of the saint. But such a trifle as the opinion of the highest representative of the Church of that province could not hinder Plevh's plan and the unwilling archbishop was replaced by a more obedient dignitary of the Church.

Soon the religious festivities commenced. To please the Czar all the high dignitaries brought offerings to the newly discovered saint. All sorts of images—lamps, rugs and adornments—were brought to the fortunate monastery by the pilgrims. Cripples, beggars, paralytics came flocking from the neighboring provinces, and the police were overworked regulating the constant stream of people at the monastery. The weather was splendid. The fields, covered with meagre crops, the huts stripped of most of the furniture for nonpayment of taxes, the people exhausted from the famine, the emaciated children—all these were covered with decorative contrivances to deceive the great visitors who were expected at the monastery.

The Czar, deeply interested in all the details of the canonization of the new saint, prayed in the churches, at the rocks and the springs; he carried the images and the oaken casket into which the skeleton of Seraphim was placed. Aside from the naive peasants there was not a soul, not a heart, that beat in unison with that of the Czar. All, beginning with the cunning monks and Plevh and ending with the last lackey of the Imperial suite, concealed their real thoughts, figuring the profits derived by them from the Czar's "simplicity," and they made every effort to demonstrate their devotion and religious feelings.

Over the modest coffin of the hermit, who had known life and the world so well, and who had fled from the worldly life to the desert of Sarov, an orgy of hypocrisy and deceit was arranged. It looked as though there, under the mask of saintliness, the abyss of human weakness was revealed, and the bells of the monastery rang in the air, performing the feat as quickly as a squirrel could have done it.

From this elevated position the blacksnake surveyed the man in triumph. But its exultation was short lived, for a vigorous shake of the tree brought it down, and as it fell up, the soft bed of leaves at the hunter's feet the man threw himself upon the serpent and succeeded in catching it.

Even then the blacksnake did not lose its head, but by an unexpected movement managed to fasten one of its teeth in a finger, inflicting deep scratches.

The naturalist kept this snake for nearly two months. It proved to be the most intractable of blacksnakes. Whenever the naturalist took it into his hands it would exhibit much ingenuity in its attempts to escape.

Both were washed and dressed and introduced to Nicholas II. As soon as Mikha noticed the Czar he started to howl. The interpreter was asked what he meant by his howling. The interpreter replied:

"He wishes to see the children." The Czar was greatly pleased and the children were brought in. Then Mikha howled still more. The interpreter declared that Mikha was overjoyed and that he asked for tea with preserves. This remark seemed strange even to the Emperor. Mikha was kept in the palace a little longer; he drank tea with preserves, and then he was sent back to his native town. But what is still stranger, Mikha was invited again to the palace after some time had elapsed. But after the second visit Mikha's fame as a saint waned rapidly.

A new saint became the favorite of the Czar. He was a peasant from the government of Kazan. Endowed with all the qualifications of a skillful charlatan, he was extremely successful. He made a little fortune for himself and managed to secure profitable positions for others who applied to him. At one time most of the important appointments came through this Kazan peasant. This may sound incredible, but it is a fact known to all who are in any way familiar with the Russian court.

Only those who knew how to break through the rows of the court camarilla lived in clover in this atmosphere. Such men as Witte and Plevh walked their arm in arm with the descendants of the Burika and the lovers of Catherine II. clever adventurers worked together with

insignificant members of the royal suite. Their tongues were given for falsehood, eyes for guessing the expression of the face, ears for eavesdropping, feet for blocking others and causing them to stumble. Such men as Prince Paul Dolgorukov, A. A. Mukhanov and Saburov, known as honest, devoted monarchists, were forced to resign their posts. And their places were filled by the Walla, the Kluge and the Trepoys.

The Trepoys family was represented by all the sons of the former prefect of St. Petersburg, Gen. Trepoys, whom Von Zauklich attempted to assassinate. All his sons made splendid careers, notwithstanding their limited abilities; but Dmitry Trepoys, a handsome officer of the Guards, was the most successful of the brothers. While still an officer he showed inclinations for police service. When he was appointed chief of police of Moscow his star began to rise rapidly.

Trepoys became the bosom friend of Grand Duke Sergius and of the Duchess. It was Trepoys who organized the crusade against the Jews of Moscow, and at the same time he organized the charitable institutions in which the Grand Dukes Elizabeth Feodorovna was interested. His influence kept growing and within a short time all the progressive elements found themselves more oppressed than ever before by this uneducated and suspicious man. This won for him the favor of the Czar, to whom he was warmly recommended by Grand Duke Sergius.

After the terrorist act directed against him by the revolutionists he left Moscow and came to St. Petersburg.

Before this Plevh, disappointed in his hopes centered upon Saint Seraphim, and not yet confident that the affairs in the far East would culminate in a war with Japan, turned to the traditional means of rejuvenating patriotism and the autocracy; he commenced his pogrom policy, the policy of massacres. In 1903 the Kishineff and Homel massacres took place.

Although the same circumstances caused both massacres, circumstances which had absolutely no connection with the Jewish question, the general attention was directed chiefly to the Kishineff massacre. The reason for this was that a letter written by Plevh to Gov. Raabon of Psewarabia was published, plainly showing Plevh as the initiator and organizer of the massacre in which hundreds of Jewish families lost their lives.

The technical side of the massacres is so well known now that it is not necessary to describe it here.

When the London Times published the text of Plevh's letter to Gov. Raabon the notorious maker of pogroms was enraged. Gov. Raabon was immediately removed by Von Plevh. Not knowing that the St. Petersburg correspondent of the London Times had absolutely nothing to do with the publication of the letter, Plevh ordered the correspondent to be immediately expelled from Russia.

Plevh manufactured an answer and appointed Prince Urusov as Governor of Bessarabia.

The Czar was visiting his brother-in-law at the time of the massacre, and it was in the home of the Czarita's brother that he saw the letter of Plevh in the London Times. At that time Nicholas was not yet convinced that only bloodshed could preserve and strengthen the reign of absolutism in Russia, and he was dissatisfied and angered. Some time later, when little Princess Irene, the daughter of the Grand Duke, who was visiting the Czar, died in the Russian palace, with all symptoms of poisoning, it was believed the poison that it was Plevh's revenge directed against Irene's father, who had called the Czar's attention to the letter.

To show that he had had no hand in the Kishineff massacre Von Plevh allowed another massacre to take place in Homel in August of the same year.

Toward the end of 1903 it became evident that a war with Japan was inevitable, and preparations were now made openly. At the New Year's reception, at which most of the diplomats were present, Nicholas told the Japanese Ambassador quite harshly that Russia was great and powerful and that he would not advise Japan to start a war.

The outward calm which seemed to exist in Russia on the eve of the war deceived the Russian people, and this helped Bezobrazov, Abramov and Nicholas to conduct the foreign policies of Russia without the knowledge of the diplomats at the head of the Government. There was a lively exchange of telegrams between the Czar and his Viceroy Alexeyev, which showed that Nicholas was provoking a conflict with Japan, for it seemed to him quite an easy matter to defeat Japan. If the Czar was deceived by his advisers during that period he was also deceiving his own Ministers and counsellors.

(To be concluded next Sunday.)